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THE STUDY OF ENGLISH IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

A report has recently been made to the Overseers of Harvard College by the Committee on Composition and Rhetoric. This report shows the very faulty use of the English language by a class of students in that ancient and honorable university.

In the report a large number of the productions of those students are printed in *facsimile*, reduced to one-half their original size. Beyond a doubt those students had no command of the English language, though they had passed the Harvard examinations and entered the institution. This is conclusive proof that the standard of admission to Harvard was low. The report deplores the fact that the professors are obliged to supplement the defective preparation of students in English, before going on to the more advanced work appropriate to them ; and it seems to lay the fault at the door of the preparatory schools.

But the preparatory schools had met the requirements. Their students had passed the entrance examinations. These schools might with equal propriety complain that the pupils who come to them are not well fitted for the work appropriate to these fitting schools ; and the lower schools may likewise insist upon a better training in English in the primary schools ; and so on to the kindergarten, the home, and even to "hereditary tendency and environment."

Again, even the graduates of Harvard and other colleges and universities, do not all write good English. To quote from one of them : "Professor Pickering of Harvard University makes a strong point in his endeavor to secure funds to properly equip the Harvard observatory in Peru by the statement that owing to the unsteady character of the atmosphere in the United States and in Europe telescopes of high magnifying power can not be used, so that even the great Lick telescope of 36 inches aperture is able to do no better work than Professor Pickering has been able to do in Peru with a little 13-inch instrument, a statement that would be readily accepted by those who have watched in vain for the announcement of astronomical discoveries from the Lick observatory." Another : "It is certainly most unfortunate, looked at from a standpoint entirely outside of republican partisanship, that, if Mr. Cleveland was to be elected, it could not have happened that

there should have been such a result of the voting as would have thrown the election into congress, in which case, though the ex-president would have been again placed in the presidential chair, the country would have been spared the placing of such a man as Mr. Adlai E. Stevenson in direct line of succession to the presidency of the United States."

No one would for one moment suppose that these overloaded sentences are the result of the superior instruction at Harvard ; neither is the defect in the training of students who enter that institution necessarily, or probably, due to poor teaching in the preparatory schools. These defects may be attributable to a variety of causes ; and among these causes, is one which is suggested at the close of the following quotation from a college graduate : "Education does not appear to be a panacea for temporal distress in that land of the highly educated, Germany, for one of the German officials declares that there are 'lawyers, physicians and doctors of philosophy among those who are regularly relieved by the poor board,' but it is manifestly unfair to lay this condition of things in Germany to the discredit of education, which can not be expected to make successful lawyers, ministers or doctors out of dolts."

Let it be noted that the imperfect product of the schools and colleges is not always due to faults in the schools. But without bandying the blame from the editor to the college, when he finds that the student fresh from college can not write good English ; from the college to the fitting school ; from the fitting school to the grammar school ; and so on, to the primary school, and the kindergarten, let us admit that the study of English has been defective ; and let us seek a remedy.

In the public schools of France, the study of the French language and literature occupies one-fifth of the time. If the English language and literature were to occupy as large a proportion of the time in our school curriculum, the education of our children would be greatly improved. For there is no study in the whole course which may be made a better instrument of culture, than the study of English. It concerns itself with close and accurate thinking ; and this kind of thinking is the very end and aim of education.

I. The study of English includes oral speech and written or printed language. The first of these is as important with young

pupils as is the last ; and with advanced students the careful study of their oral speech is of great value, though it has generally received but little attention. In society, conversation is frequently carried on in a careless, thoughtless way ; words are often used with very little regard to their meaning ; expressions are employed because they are novel or striking, rather than because they are appropriate and fitting. And quite generally a word does duty, in oral speech, in a sense very remote from its real meaning. "Awful" "almighty," "splendid," are words commonly used to express a mere superlative. The same bad habit of oral speaking is not unfrequently allowed in the classroom. The pupil recites in slovenly language ; he translates a foreign language into English which is inappropriate, unidiomatic, and incorrect ; he demonstrates a problem in geometry in language both inelegant and fragmentary ; in his recitation in history or geography, the statements are broken and disjointed ; in his attempt to narrate a circumstance or to express an opinion, he is careless about the language employed ; and in all these cases the teacher is watching so closely for the glimmer of the thought that he fails to notice the language in which the thought is expressed.

The study of English, then, should begin with oral speech ; and especially it should so begin the first day of school in the lowest grade. This careful attention to oral language must not be omitted at any stage of school life. Oral speech precedes written language ; and if the written language of pupils in school, at first and all along, were made the basis of the written work—the themes and compositions—these exercises would be robbed of all their terror.

The child begins to talk at a very early age ; and he knows the meaning of many words long before he can pronounce them. On coming to school his vocabulary is much larger than we have credited him with, and his power of expression is greater than most teachers suppose. It has been assumed that the vocabulary of a child four or five years old contains three or four hundred words. Few people would place the number as high as five or six hundred. From a series of experiments covering a large field, and made with the purpose of ascertaining certain other facts as well as the extent of the child's vocabulary, it has been shown that the ordinary child at the age of four or five years has the

command of twelve hundred words ; and many children at the age of five know the meaning and the use of fifteen hundred words.

Now the first and the chief duty of the teacher is, to induce the child just entering school to talk—to express himself. He knows a great deal more than he gets credit for ; there is a presumption of brains, of thought, and of ability to speak. Of course the little child is timid ; and amidst the unusual surroundings—the “environment,” to use an educational term—he retires within himself. It is the duty of the teacher to secure his confidence, and to induce him to reveal his inner self, his thought, and to delight in this revelation.

I have called this the chief duty because the expression of thought begets thought in the child. The thought may be stimulated by objects, toys, the kindergarten gifts and occupations, objects of nature of every variety, stories, plays,—anything whatever that interests him. The oral language—the child’s own—may next be written upon the blackboard for him to read ; and the written characters should be to him the representatives, of the sounds he has made in speaking. “I see a cat,” written upon the blackboard, means to the child, “I s-ēē ā c-ā-t.” When the expression is changed to “I see a hat,”—“a mat,” he will at once notice that the *c*, the *h*, and the *m*, each modifies the meaning in accordance with his own thought. Not to explain at length this elementary process of teaching reading : The important fact in this connection is that the child connects his oral speech with the written language. He is led to see that written language is the expression of thought, his own thought ; and thus the reading is vitalized, so to speak ; made a living thing. From this stage it is only a step for him to perceive that written language may also be the expression of another person’s thought. It is important that he so look upon it later, when he sees the written or printed language in a book. Simultaneously with learning to read from the blackboard the visible representation of his oral speech, and to translate that and other writing into oral language, the child may be occupied with writing his speech upon the slate or on paper, without the preliminary step of uttering it with his mouth and seeing it written by the teacher. The child is taught to think, to express himself in words, to recognize the written language as another form of his own thought, and to reproduce his thought in visible form ; and incidentally he learns

that all written or printed language is the expression of thought. He thus learns, at the very outset of his school education, to look behind the language, whether oral or written, for the thought that lies within.

The above is not intended merely to be an essay on the first steps in teaching reading. Its significance, in my view, consists in this: That the process here outlined—the thought, its oral and visible expression, and the perception of the thought in printed or written language—that this process is the same in every stage of the study of English. The process begins in the primary school; and it never ends.

Language is the expression of thought; it is this only; it should always suggest to the student the thought which it embodies; and the student should look beyond the mere form, and perceive the immaterial essence.

II. The oral expression whose value I have attempted to emphasize at the very start, in school life, ought, in my judgment, to receive equal attention at every stage of the public schools. The pupil ought to be accustomed to express in clear, concise, and appropriate language, whatever he has seen or thought, or been concerned about. This oral expression should be a daily practice. Every recitation ought to be made a study of English. The form and the fitness of the expression should be looked upon as of equal importance with the matter to be expressed; for there is no definite thought without definite expression. Vague language involves vague thought; and this careful attention to the language, constant and unremitting, is a great part, if not the best, the most important part, of school education. Of two partners in a business firm, the older had been seriously ill for many years; at length the younger failed in health, and finally died. Some one remarked that it was "funny" that the younger man had died first. It was not funny at all; it may have been remarkable or strange. But in criticising language in this way, it is quite possible to fall into a habit of being finical and over-nice. Language, also, which may be appropriate in oral speech, may not be as appropriate when written. It requires much observation and practice, and a delicate sense of fitness, to discriminate with certainty and precision between words and expressions that are colloquial and forcible, and those which are coarse or bordering on the vulgar. A taste too fastidious in the use of language, makes the style stiff and stilted.

In the SCHOOL REVIEW, Vol. I, No. 2, Mr. Brainerd Kellogg of the Polytechnic Institute, Brooklyn, gives us certain words and phrases which the usage of the best writers says we may employ ; but which "purists tell us we *may not, must not use.*" "We may use *each other*, of more than two things, and *one another*, of only two ; *a word or two*, as well as *one or two words* ; *had rather* or *had better* with the present infinitive, etc." The importance of close attention to the speech consists less in the words and expressions whose proper use is learned, than in the habit of attending to the expression. It is the study of both pupil and teacher which produces the good habit of thought ; and this habit leads not only to correct expression, but to correct and orderly thinking ; and this is vastly more important. From this habit of much talking by the pupil, under the guidance of the teacher, the habit of writing grows naturally. He has expressed his thought in speech ; let him take his seat and, in the presence of his teacher and his schoolmates, let him write, simply and straight on, the same which he has spoken, with no particular attention to the writing or the form of expression ;—that is, with no more attention than he gave to his language while speaking. In both cases, equally, his attention is upon the thought ; and he notices the language only as it expresses his thought. At the end of the period—fifteen or twenty minutes—the paper may be folded and laid upon the teacher's desk. At the next exercise, this paper may be examined carefully by the pupil ; and he will then see how nearly he has said what he intended to say, and he may correct the writing in any way he chooses. Subsequently, the teacher may examine and correct the paper, or the pupil may rewrite it.

It is my firm belief that children brought up in this way, would find no more difficulty in writing what they have to say than they would have in speaking it orally ; it would in fact be about the same thing. We are assuming, of course, that this habit of expression, both oral and written, has been continuous throughout the schools ; and that the time for each exercise, and the matter talked and written about, have been adapted to the age and capacity of the pupil.

III. Thus far in this discussion not much has been said about a most important feature in exercises of this kind :—that is, the source from which the ideas to be expressed, are to be derived.

In the primary school these ideas come from objects, plays, stories, etc.; and in the more advanced grades, many of the ideas come naturally from the other studies of the school—the geography, the history, the natural science, etc., and from the places of interest, the factories, the shops, and the various processes of manufacture which the pupil may be interested in visiting and describing. But the main reliance for the ideas to be thought about and written about, must be books adapted to the age of the pupil :—books of natural history, fairy tales, books of travel, biography and history ; and the reading and the study of well selected books all along in the course is another means for the study of English. The careful reading of books, in connection with the speaking and the writing outlined above, serves a two-fold end:—In the first place the reading—always with the attention chiefly upon the thought, as said above—fills the mind with something to think about and to talk and write about ; and in the second place, the language, the form of expression, the style of the writing, imperceptibly and unconsciously mould the form of speech of the pupil ; and this without his knowing it. He should not attempt, of course, to repeat orally or to write, immediately after he has finished the reading. Some time should elapse between the reading and the writing, in order that the new ideas may, as it were, digest in the mind, and be assimilated with his thought, so as to become his own. The exact language will not be remembered. And yet the new idea suggested by the reading will retain something of the form of expression in which it was clothed, the thought and the expression are so nearly allied ; and this form will affect the written language of the pupil. Thus the reading both expands the thought of the pupil and enlarges the power of expressing that thought.

This habit of reading, and of repeating orally and in writing the substance of what he has read, introduces the pupil to the best literature gradually, and in step with his growing appreciation, and his increasing power of expression ; and there is no limit to this power of expression so long as the mind may expand, and there is thought to be expressed.

M. François Gouin, in his admirable book, *The Art of Teaching and Studying Languages*, says that language is of two kinds :—objective and subjective ; the objective language being that which expresses the thought suggested by some external

object, and the subjective language being that which expresses what originates in the mind itself—its own emotion or reflection, as it were. "The wheel turns around," for example, expresses a fact perceived through the senses, a fact in the external world ; "That is right," on the other hand, is the expression of a reflection in the mind itself.

This objective language expresses a kind of thought which, it appears to me, a dumb creature, an irrational animal, as we say, might have. The child says, "The wheel turns round ;" the trained animal notices the motion of his master's hand, compares it with former experiences, and forms a judgment ; and he acts accordingly. Why does not this mental process in the intelligent animal correspond with the human thought expressed in what Mr. Gouin calls objective language? The thought expressed by the subjective language is of a more exalted kind ; it is the rational thought of a higher order of intellect ; it is a kind of thought above and beyond that which is produced by material objects or sense perceptions, and manual occupations ; it is a kind of thought to which all right education leads up. This higher kind of thought is expressed in our literature. In this literature are expressed the feelings, the emotions, passions, poetry, and the sense of beauty, the hopes and aspirations, the fears and the despairs of human hearts. English is to be studied in its literature ; and the study of this literature is the study of the race, and of humanity.

Now, language cannot express to any one very much beyond that which he has lived and experienced. In order to find a response in the mind, the language must appeal to something already in the mind ; there must be in the mind of the reader, a correspondence, some resemblance, something with which to compare. Hence a young child could have no conception of *Paradise Lost*, for example.

Now, as the power of expression should grow by use both in oral speech and in written language, as I have endeavored to point out ; as the thought should grow correspondingly, and be nourished by observation and reading, and by expression all along through the elementary stages ;—so it appears to me the student's own language should form the basis of his study of literature. That is to say, his knowledge of the structure, the force, and the beauty of the language, should be developed from within ; should be a growth and not a mere accretion.

To begin again at the bottom. Is spelling to be learned? The words one uses are of most interest. Is the grammatical structure of the sentence to be studied? For this study the pupil's own language should be examined. It is his own. He knows what it means; and he can therefore more easily appreciate the force which he has put into every part of it, and can understand the effect upon the sense which any modification of its form and structure may produce. Is rhetoric to be learned? How can the nature of a figure of speech be better understood by the student than by recognizing the one which he himself has used? The same is true of the orderly and effective arrangement of words, and of every other principle of rhetoric. The student may study grammar indefinitely, but he will never really know grammar till he has used the language; and it is better for him to study the grammar in his language than to attempt to learn the grammar and then to conform his language to it. He may study rhetoric for years without appreciating fully what it is, unless he has put its principles in practice in actual writing;—not merely in inventing examples, and dissecting the examples of other people, which is generally worse than a waste of time. Does any body suppose that any one of our great writers, Macaulay for example, while writing, ever stopped to say to himself, "Now I will introduce a striking metaphor;" "Now I will set forth this incident in a brilliant period?" He could not have made those glowing sentences of his in such a way if he had tried. He was full of his subject; and the writing and the illustrations were perfectly spontaneous. Much less can any young student write well, when he is thinking of writing well instead of thinking of his subject, and what he has to say about it.

In the study of grammar, which is the study of English, I would have every principle pointed out in the language which the pupil has used. Those grand divisions, the subject and the predicate, that which is spoken of and that which is said, may be pointed out very early. The uses of words in the sentence, as nouns, verbs, adjectives, etc., may be made very clear by reference to the child's own writing or speaking. All the rest may be found in some one of the brief manuals, such as the first chapters of *Foundations of Rhetoric*, lately issued by Professor Hill of Harvard, and the *Manual of English Composition*, by Nichols, published by Macmillan & Co.

In the report of the Committee, already referred to, it is noted that skill in athletic sports cannot be acquired from books ; it must be attained by practice, if at all, and the value of the scientific instruction in the books consists in directing merely, and correcting, the practice. The same is true in learning the English language ; and the inference from the report is that students come to Harvard well fitted in athletics, and poorly prepared in English. This inference, undoubtedly, corresponds to the facts ; and my aim is to introduce into the learning of English the principle of practice now used in learning the athletics.

But the study of English does not consist merely in learning how to use the language. The main purpose of the study is, to mine from the literature the treasures embedded there.

IV. For the thorough, or even a partial discussion of this important part of the study of English there is not now time ; nor is there very much necessity, because the ground has been carefully covered in the various works in the teaching of literature. The latest to come under my observation, and one of the best is, a little work entitled *Longer English Poems*, edited by J. W. Hales, M.A., and published by Macmillan & Co., London and New York.

To show what may be done in the study of any selection of prose or poetry, in an introductory essay, *Suggestions on the Teaching of English*, the author has taken up Scott's *Rosabelle* : The piece is first learned by heart ; its meaning is next considered ; minor, subsidiary matters, allusions to manners and customs, etc., are then taken up ; hereupon the question of prosody or of rhythm receives consideration ; something about the author comes next, and matters of grammar follow ; the words of *Rosabelle* are studied with reference to derivation and origin ; and finally, the subject-matter of the poem having been considered in its various aspects, an attempt at criticism may be encouraged, and a recapitulation of the whole is advisable. "After some such lesson as that just attempted," the author goes on to say, "proper curtailments and expansions having been made, will not the intelligence of the pupil have been thoroughly exercised?—will not his previously acquired knowledge have been called into use and arranged better?—will he not have added something to that better ordered store?—will he not, while awaking to a pleasant consciousness of what the power of his mind is, and what appar-

ent entanglements it can unravel if properly trained and directed, learn also how much there is that is beyond his reach, and how, of what lies within his reach, the better part may not be won 'without dust and heat : '—learn the great lesson which concerns not only his schoolboy days, but all the days of his life, that there is nothing worthy to be achieved without sincere, undaunted, never-wearying industry ? ”

For this kind of study I commend the little poem on Columbia's Emblem, the Golden Corn, to be recognized, I trust, as the typical plant of America, as the thistle is of Scotland, and the lily of France.

COLUMBIA'S EMBLEM.

Blazon Columbia's emblem
 The bounteous, golden Corn !
 Eons ago, of the great sun's glow
 And the joy of the earth, 'twas born.
 From Superior's shore to Chili,
 From the ocean of dawn to the West,
 With its banners of green and tasseled sheen,
 It sprang at the sun's behest ;
 And by dew and shower, from its natal hour,
 With honey and wine 'twas fed,
 Till the gods were fain to share with men
 The perfect feast outspread.
 For the rarest boon to the land they loved
 Was the Corn so rich and fair,
 Nor star nor breeze o'er the farthest seas
 Could find its like elsewhere.

In their holiest temples the Incas
 Offered the heaven-sent maize—
 Grains wrought of gold, in a silver fold,
 For the sun's enraptured gaze ;
 And its harvest came to the wandering tribes
 As the gods' own gift and seal ;
 And Montezuma's festal bread
 Was made of its sacred meal.
 Narrow their cherished fields ; but ours
 Are broad as the continent's breast,
 And lavish as leaves, the rustling sheaves
 Bring plenty and joy and rest.
 For they strew the plains and crowd the wains
 When the reapers meet at morn,
 Till blithe cheers ring and west winds sing
 A song for the garnered Corn.

The rose may bloom for England,
The lily for France unfold ;
Ireland may honor the shamrock,
Scotland her thistle bold ;
But the shield of the great Republic,
The glory of the West,
Shall bear a stalk of the tasseled Corn,
Of all our wealth the best.
The arbutus and the golden rod
The heart of the North may cheer,
And the mountain laurel for Maryland
Its royal clusters rear ;
And jasmine and magnolia
The crest of the South adorn ;
But the wide Republic's emblem
Is the bounteous, golden Corn !

In all that precedes, no allusion has been made to that broad and fertile field for cultivation—the imagination, a world in itself for the child. What an imaginative child lives, has recently been portrayed by Frances Hodgson Burnett in her description of the *One I Knew Best of All*, begun in the February, 1893, Scribner ; and J. G. Holland some years ago in a story called *Arthur Bonnicastle*, published in the early *Scribner's Magazine*, shows most admirably how character and power may be developed by proper culture of the imagination. But for all this there is here no time. My simple purpose is to show that the basis of all study of English should be the child's, or the student's, own language by which he has expressed thought :—to show that the growth should be from within.

A. P. Marble.

Boston, Mass.